



Working Lands Alliance
A Project of American Farmland Trust

Date: February 23, 2011

To: Environment Committee

Testimony in Support of: **H.B. 5508: AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Submitted by: Ben Bowell, Acting Project Director, Working Lands Alliance

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, a statewide coalition of caring individuals and more than 200 organizations and businesses working together to raise awareness of the need and importance of saving Connecticut's valuable and vanishing farmland.

The Working Lands Alliance is supportive of revitalizing the Governor's Council for Agricultural Development which could look broadly at opportunities for agriculture in Connecticut and provide guidance to the Department of Agriculture.

A standing Council could serve as an advocate for farming in the state and provide an opportunity for representatives across the spectrum of Connecticut agriculture to collaborate and identify common goals.

Public interest in and demand for local food and farm products is remarkably high. However, consumers spend a small portion of total expenditures on Connecticut grown products. The Council for Agricultural Development could help farmers in the state to seize the current opportunity and gather momentum to identify policy changes and new initiatives to Keep it Growing.

Connecticut agriculture is a \$3.5 billion industry with over 20,000 jobs. A revitalized Council could recommend ways to grow the state's agricultural economy over the next 10 years.

Connecticut residents spend an estimated \$13.75 billion on fresh, prepared, and processed food from supermarkets, restaurants, and other sources, less than 1% of which is spent on locally grown food.ⁱ The Council could identify obstacles and make recommendations to significantly increase the share of food dollars spent by Connecticut residents on locally grown products to 5% by 2020.

CT wood products contribute \$500 million to the state's economy as well as 3,600 jobs. Policy changes and new initiatives could be identified to increase the share of wood product dollars spent on CT-grown products. Nurseries, greenhouses, flowers and

Christmas trees account for annual sales of \$1.1 billion. The Council could examine policy changes and strategies needed to grow this sector.

WLA believes a revitalized Council for Agricultural Development would serve as an important advocate for growing agriculture in Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on this issue.

¹ 2009 Per Capita Food Expenditures (\$3,929) x population of Connecticut = \$13.75 billion; USDA Food CPI and Expenditures, Table 13. USDA 2007 Agriculture Census market value of agricultural products is \$551 million minus tobacco, horses, Christmas trees, and non-food nursery = \$98 million, or .72% of total food purchases.